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THE CAYAPA AND COLORADO

By JOHN MURRA

INTRODUCTION

The *Cayapa* and the *Colorado* are the last surviving Indian groups in the lush western lowlands of Ecuador (maps 1 and 6). Once an area of extensive Indian occupation, western Ecuador is now inhabited by a Spanish-speaking population of mixed Indian, Negro, and white ancestry, known as montuvios. The *Cayapa* and *Colorado* have precariously managed to hang on to their jungle homes. Speaking closely related if mutually unintelligible languages of the *Barbacoan* division of the *Chibchan* family, they represent the southernmost extension of that major division. Comparative studies with other *Chibchan*-speaking groups in Highland and eastern Colombia, with *Quechua*-speaking Indians in Highland Ecuador, and with various Montaña groups should prove of considerable culture-historical interest.

THE CAYAPA

The *Cayapa* are a riverain people inhabiting the lowlands of northwestern Ecuador. Sprinkled through the jungles of Esmeraldas Province, an area of difficult colonization and control, they managed for centuries to avoid the enslavement suffered by their Highland neighbors or the ethnic annihilation of most Coast aborigines. Only in the past few decades have their settlements been pushed back into the hills by Spanish-speaking montuvio and Negro homesteaders. World War II requirements in balsa wood, rubber, and other tropical commodities have accelerated this process of displacement and acculturation.

The Cayapa River and its affluents, from the mouth of the Anzole to the foot of the Andes, are the main area of *Cayapa* settlement. Barrett (1925) found three concentration spots: Punta Venado, Sapayo Grande, and San Miguel, corresponding to three political, tribal divisions, which might since have shifted or amalgamated. In addition, small groups of *Cayapa*, in various degrees of acculturation, are found in the Santiago Valley and along the coast into Colombia. Estimates of their numbers vary but hover around a mean of 2,000.

The chief source and authority on the *Cayapa* remains S. A. Barrett's monograph (1925). Barrett visited them in 1908–9, long enough to bring

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back an exhaustive account of their subsistence pattern and material culture as well as considerable data on religion and ceremonial life. According to modern interests, the report is weak in life-cycle data and economics, and a serious drawback is the almost complete lack of comparative considerations. Moreover, it describes a culture with marked European influences. Nevertheless, at this writing, it remains one of our most complete accounts of an aboriginal South American group. The remaining titles in the bibliography refer to linguistic treatises, hearsay accounts, and phantasies of hurried travelers.

The inaccessibility of their habitat facilitated the *Cayapa's* survival into the 20th century, but it also prevented most chroniclers from visiting their land. Early references to naked and painted Indians living along the Patia River in large houses on tall poles and wearing gold ornaments might refer to the *Cayapa* or to some other *Chibchan* people. Jijón y Caamaño (1940–45, vol. 2) has reproduced fragments from an unpublished Cabello Balboa chronicle discussing the people of Esmeraldas Province during the 16th century. Among the peoples figuring prominently in Cabello Balboa's report are the *Nigua*, an Indian group inhabiting traditional *Cayapa* territory. Jijón y Caamaño's suggestion (1940–45, vol. 2) that the *Nigua* and *Cayapa* are one people seems tentatively acceptable.

Both peoples claimed to have descended from the Andean Highlands, though it is unclear if they were refugees from the *Inca* or Spanish invasions. As reported by Barrett, this tradition is very strong even now, four centuries after the Conquest, permeating various divergent activities of the *Cayapa*, who date many techniques and artifacts in terms of pre- or post-migration practices. In 1907 Beuchat and Rivet had pointed to toponymic and archeological similarities between Esmeraldas Province and the *Cara* country in the Highlands. Later work by Jijón y Caamaño (1912, 1919, 1940–45, vol. 2) has strengthened the case for *Chibchan* affiliation of the *Cara* language and given a measure of confirmation to native tradition.

CULTURE

SUBSISTENCE ACTIVITIES

Agriculture is the main occupation of the *Cayapa*, although fishing and hunting supply a large percentage of their food. Each house is surrounded by clearings and fields, and additional clearings are customarily made away from the river, in the bush. Most families have fields of plantains, bananas, sugarcane, coca, and sweet manioc (yuca); in addition, cotton, tobacco, maize, yams, and pineapples are frequently cultivated. Many wild plants are encouraged through weeding and other care.

Plantains (pl. 60, *bottom, right*) form the staple food of the *Cayapa*, and each family will have several acres planted to this perennially ripening fruit. Bananas are fed to the hogs and cover an acreage almost as large as that of the plantain.

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as that of the plantain. Almost every family owns its cane mill and distillery, which are supplied by the omnipresent canefields.

With all this emphasis on agriculture, the *Cayapa* are, nevertheless, a jungle people, skilled hunters of many species of rodents, deer, felines, peccaries, armadillos, and birds. Life at the riverside encourages and is encouraged by dependence on fish, crustaceans, shellfish, and crocodile eggs. Under aboriginal conditions the *Cayapa* were probably never hungry.

Hogs and chickens are now kept everywhere. Dogs are not conspicuously reported.

Food is mostly boiled, though frequently meat will be broiled or baked. Surpluses are dried and smoked.

HOUSES AND VILLAGES

Though maps traditionally locate *Capaya* "villages," these are nothing but agglomerations of three or four houses and a church. The houses stand empty most of the year and are used only at holidays when the priests visit the *Cayapa*.

The actual habitations of the people are spread through the jungle, always at riversides (pl. 57, *top*) and usually isolated from one another by fields or even uncleared stretches. The houses stand on high poles 6 to 12 feet off the ground and are reached by removable ladders. The roof is thatched with palm leaves (pl. 57, *center*), and the rectangular house is virtually unenclosed. Sometimes the house floor is separated into two parts, one for cooking, the other for sleeping and eating. One chief had a large house (pl. 57, *bottom*) which could seat 40 people and which had more than two "rooms." The furniture is scanty: hammocks are used for sitting and sleeping, and wooden seats are sometimes found. An attempt by Barrett to correlate these seats with the famous stone seats of Manabi (Handbook, vol. 2, p. 780) seems very inconclusive.

In addition to permanent houses, small temporary ranchos are sometimes built when people are far from home. The houses in the "village" are standard structures, but the church follows Spanish ways: it rests on the ground and has walls.

CLOTHING AND ADORNMENT

Although *Cayapa* tradition records a period when the people wore blankets and even ponchos, today their clothes are scanty (pl. 59, *bottom*). The men wear a tight, small, white garment, made like bathing trunks, and a thin gaudy shirt of calico, with short and very tight sleeves. On festive occasions vests of European cut and manufacture are frequently donned over the shirt, and so are felt fedoras.

Women wear a long skirt of native cloth, girded with a narrow fringed belt. As in the Highlands, several skirts of different weights are sometimes worn. Head, shoulders, and chest are usually left bare.

291 Children wear no clothes at all until they are 6 or 8.

301 The hair is worn loose, long, and flowing by the women but is clipped
302 above the ears by the men. Both sexes wear necklaces and wristbands of glass and porcelain beads, coins, seeds, and beetle wings. Only women wear earrings.

302 The traditional *Chibcha* custom of frequently painting body and face is found among the *Cayapa*. Red, yellow, and black are used, and the designs are very numerous. Barrett reproduces many of the motifs and insists that there is no special significance attached to any of them, nor is there any age, sex, or property correlation.

TRANSPORTATION

501 **Watercraft.**—A large part of every *Cayapa's* life is spent on the water fishing and traveling. Canoes are built with great skill and care. They
[439] can withstand not only fluvial but also maritime travel and are routinely sold in the "civilized" coast towns. They are dugouts, usually 10 to 12 yards long but sometimes much larger. Balsa-wood logs are sometimes used as outriggers.

MANUFACTURES

000 Details of *Cayapa* manufactures are contained in Barrett's work, which describes and illustrates finished products and minutely discusses the techniques of preparation.

322 **Woodworking.**—Woodworking includes house building, making deadfall traps, and carving seats and children's dolls.

285 **Weaving and basketry.**—The women weave cotton cloth on a narrow
286 native loom, and the men do the sewing. The men also weave the fishing
462 nets and hammocks. Barrett's discussion of *Cayapa* basketry is outstanding. The *Cayapa* make many kinds of baskets, mats, and fans of bark and of various roots.

323 **Pottery.**—Pottery is crude and undecorated. It is used particularly for
177 storage. Tradition claims that in their old Highland habitat the *Cayapa* made better pottery but that calabashes have since largely replaced ceramics.

324 **Stonework and metalwork.**—Stonework is limited to the metates
325 used in grinding corn and plantains. Although in aboriginal times Lowland Ecuador was a famous area of metallurgy, there is no evidence that the contemporary *Cayapa* practiced it.

411 **Weapons.**—The weapon most widely used today is the muzzle-loading
177 shotgun. The blowgun was important in the past, but today its use is restricted to boys, who shoot poison darts while playing at hunting. Hardwood lances are being given up, and the bow and arrow is said not to be mentioned in *Cayapa* tradition. The steel machete is ubiquitous.

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ECONOMICS

The *Cayapa* economic unit is the virtually self-sufficient, one-family household. Land is owned and worked familially, and there is as much land to be had as the family can clear. If any special rules govern distribution and inheritance, they are not reported by our sources. Also, there seem to be very few provisions for interhousehold cooperation: men will help a neighbor bring down a tree trunk from the hills, but all other activities are evidently left to individual enterprise.

This self-sufficiency does not apply to all spheres of activity. Machetes and rifles are essential in jungle life, and most families make at least one trip a year to the coast for trading and social purposes. In the small Ecuadorean and Colombian towns they find a ready market for rubber, tagua nuts, and other forest products. Cocoa is grown specifically for this trade. There is also a limited market for some of their manufactures: canoes, mats, fans, and other basketry. In exchange, the *Cayapa* want metal goods: axes, machetes, shotguns, fishhooks, fish spears, and copper tubing for their distilleries. But they also like beads and mirrors, pearls, vests, and old derby hats. In recent years machine-made muslins and calicoes have been edging out native-made cloth.

The *Cayapa* are not yet incorporated in Ecuadorean economy. Their need for metal goods and trinkets has not yet forced them to work on plantations or in placer gold mines. Their own supply of rum has helped them avoid debts contracted for alcohol, and they have usually retreated into the forest when their self-sufficiency has been menaced. It is improbable that this selective acculturation can last very long.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

The basic *Cayapa* social unit is the household. Though there is no definite indication as to size and composition, it appears to be an extended family including normally no more than 10 to 12 people. Chief Antonio Napa's house at Punta Venado could seat some 40-odd people at a feast, but it was unique in size, and the Napa household according to Basurco (1894) had only 8 to 10 members.

Barrett (1925) presents a detailed chart of kinship terms used by the *Cayapa*. We unfortunately know nothing about the behavior that goes with the terms or about marriage rules. On the face of it the system is a "lineal" one—collateral relatives are separated from lineal ones but are not differentiated among themselves. Thus, the term for uncle applies to both paternal and maternal ones. All terms are highly descriptive. There is no evidence of reciprocal use of terms, but Barrett's chart is not really complete. The system is quite unique and interesting.

The lineal and descriptive nature of the kinship system emphasizes the bilateral character of the *Cayapa* family. There is no clan organization. The extended family household is the truly basic social unit. There is

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[611] There is some evidence of patrilocality, which might be reflected in the closer group-
596 ing of terms for fraternal nephews and great-nephews. But the patrilineal
596 bias does not seem very strong. Within the family, men do all the fishing
462 and hunting, the women all the food gathering, cooking, child rearing, and weaving. Men always do the sewing. Women make baskets, mats, and all the pottery. The two sexes cooperate in agriculture, the men clearing the fields, their wives tending the crops and harvesting. They also cooperate in the distillation of rum and the paddling of canoes while on trips.

631 Politically, the *Cayapa* tribe is divided into three parts: Punta Venado,
177 Sapayo Grande, and San Miguel. Each has its chief (gobernador) and
622 a full complement of Spanish-titled officials: secretario, teniente politico, alcalde, comisario, capitán, and sargento. The governor carries a cane
[643] of black chonta wood with a silver head symbolizing his authority. Barrett feels that in most cases Spanish nomenclature was imposed on
[777] aboriginal positions. All offices are hereditary in the patrilineal line, but the new job holder needs the confirmation of the priest. The main duties of this leadership deal with the enforcement of law and order and the dispensation of justice.

463 None of these positions is a full-time duty, and there is no material
622 compensation for exercising them. The chief has the largest house along the river, where he holds court and supervises punishments. He is quite responsive to public opinion and enjoys considerable prestige.

WARFARE

646 The *Cayapa* pride themselves on their peaceable relations with their neighbors. Tradition records no war since the mythological Indios Bravos were defeated and driven from the country. Lances and blowguns were used principally for war.

LIFE CYCLE

644 **Childbirth.**—There are few restrictions placed on the mother at child-
[645] birth. Heimann's (1931–32) report of the couvade is specifically contradicted by Barrett. Godparents baptize the infant, who takes their name.
583 Children are never punished, and even the universal annual ceremonial
858 whipping omits the young. Extremely friendly relations between siblings
785 seem to be the rule. When very young, both boys and girls begin to
693 help in adult activities or to engage in them playfully with diminutive
857 tools. Canoeing, farming, and baby tending are all mastered before the
848 child is 10 years old.

851 **Puberty and marriage.**—Barrett could find no puberty rites for either
584 sex. He suggests that courtship was left to the young people. The
585 chief marries them at a feast, where they are lectured and whipped. Like
777 succession in political office, marriage must be confirmed by the priest.

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Death.—Death is not considered to be a natural phenomenon but is attributed to the presence of malevolent spirits in the body. A dead man's soul hovers around his house, which is usually abandoned, though it may be dismantled and sold. The corpse is buried in a coffin in a Catholic-style cemetery near the church. The dead man's possessions are usually given away, but it is not known who inherits his fields and clearings.

RECREATIVE AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Art.—The great range of designs used by the *Cayapa* in their face and body painting has already been mentioned. There is a similar variety in the geometric figures used to ornament their canoes. There are no design names, nor is there any apparent significance in their variation. Animals are sometimes painted on canoes destined for the market, but only geometric designs satisfy the native consumer.

Textile decoration, particularly on women's skirts, differs from canoe and body painting in its emphasis on realistic motifs. Men, mammals, reptiles, birds, fishes, and parts thereof are frequently woven into the cloth. Interestingly enough, in both design and execution this ornamentation resembles very closely the decoration used by Highland Indians on their belts (fajas).

Calabash dishes frequently have an incised design below the rim.

Canoe paddles and wooden seats are sometimes ornamented with carved images, and children usually play with carved wooden dolls.

Music and dancing.—Holidays, weddings, and other feasts are accompanied by much dancing and drinking. As elsewhere along the coast, the European marimba is widely used, as are panpipes, flutes, drums, and rattles. In recent years the Highland San Juan dance has been gaining in popularity. Also of immediate Highland provenience may be the small European wooden harp with palm-fiber strings.

Toys.—Children's activities are usually imitative of adult pursuits. Complete sets of diminutive artifacts are made for the children. Blowguns are given the boys. Only dolls and tops seem to be specifically children's toys.

Alcoholic beverages.—There is no evidence of the use of narcotics. *Guarapo*, the fermented juice of sugarcane, and rum, its distilled by-product, are both made and liberally drunk by the people at appropriate occasions.

RELIGION

Native *Cayapa* religion has blended with many Roman Catholic practices. Baptism, marriage, and political office must be confirmed by the priest. Masses are said for the souls of the dead, and Easter and Christmas are celebrated whenever the priest happens to visit the community.

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But the soul is believed to linger after death, and the methods used to encourage its departure are strictly aboriginal. A young couple's marriage may not be consummated until solemnized by the visiting padre, but the admonitions of the village chief to both bride and groom reinforce the authority of native jurisdiction. The annual Easter whipping of the whole community is also native.

Barrett could find no clear-cut creation story. The universe is believed to be made up of three superimposed worlds, with human life centered on the middle one. Men share this middle world with many spirits, some malevolent and other benevolent, all of whom are busy affecting human happiness and goals.

Sometimes the spirits must be exorcised, as when they cause illness. For this a shaman is called, and, with the cooperation of neighbors, he drives out the spirits amid much singing, smoking, and sprinkling. The shaman also may suck out the cause of illness.

Almost anyone can become a shaman by undergoing intensive training and acquiring a set of spirit helpers. There seems to be no "predestination" for this career, though Barrett was apparently unable to get enough information on this point. Like the chief the shaman is not a full-time professional.

Because of his magic control of spirit powers, the shaman can be a force for evil as well as for good. It is he who causes illness and eventually death. There is a great deal of similarity between the behavior and the paraphernalia of the Cayapa shaman and that of the Highland medicine man.

THE COLORADO

The *Colorado*, or, as they prefer to call themselves, *Tsatchela* or *Tsachila* Indians, share with the Cayapa the distinction of being the last surviving aboriginal group in the Lowlands of western Ecuador. The two groups know about each other and even occasionally visit back and forth; but they speak mutually unintelligible languages, and their ways of life are quite distinct.

In contrast to the Cayapa, the *Colorado* are rapidly disappearing. Their territory and their numbers have been shrinking constantly, and one can easily foresee the time when the group will become extinct. They have not been able to withdraw before the pressure of "civilization," and they have been incorporated to a large degree into the Highland plantation system known as *concertaje*. The area they occupy on the upper reaches of several affluents of the Esmeraldas and Daule Rivers in the western part of Pichincha Province has been an area of heavy colonization in recent decades. During World War II an all-weather road was opened which increased the area's accessibility to colonization from the Highlands.

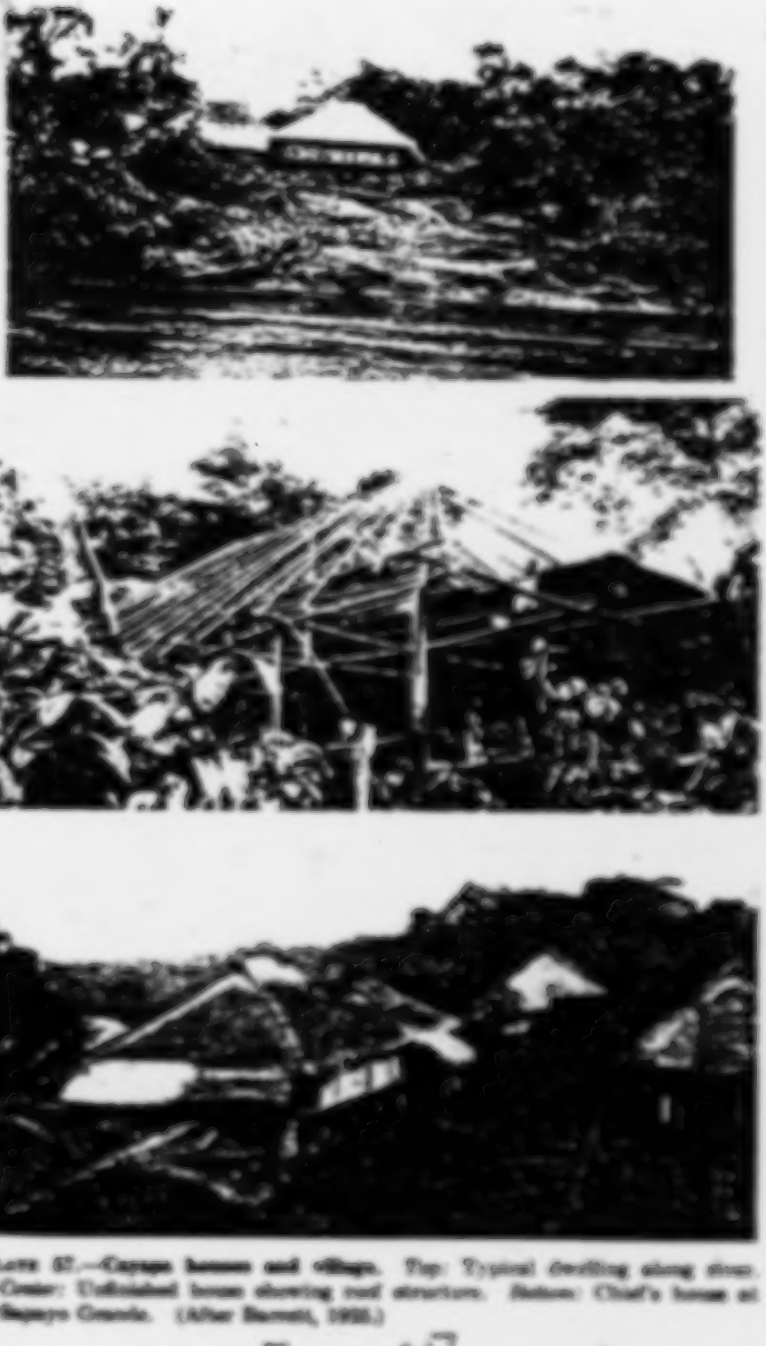

PLATE 57.—Cayapa houses and village. Top: Typical dwelling along river. Center: Unfinished house showing roof structure. Bottom: Chief's house at Bayayo Grande. (After Barnett, 1950.)

[p.284(A)]

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Plate IX.—Colorado houses, early [illegible] century. Lidar Diver, [illegible], opp. pp. [illegible]

[p 204 (h)]

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PLATE 31.—Colorado and Cayapa Indians. Top, Colorado, early 20th century. Bottom, Cayapa, water period. (After Stirling, 1940, opp. p. 168, and Barrett, 1925, p. 35.)

[p. 284(c)]

PLATE 60.—Colorado and Cayuga Indians. Top (left): Colorado man, early 20th century. Top (right): Tsistsistas (Cheyenne) man wearing silver nose ornament. Bottom (left): Tsistsistas (Cheyenne) man playing moccasins. Bottom (right): Cayuga harvest of plantains. (After Stout, 1909, opp. p. 276; after Von Hagen, 1939, pls. 1, 41; and after Dorsey, 1905, pl. 60.)

[p. 2.84(D)]